

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-08

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FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5924

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 0161

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PFOR, EG, UR

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH EGYPTIAN AMBASSADOR: CANCELLATION OF
BREZHNEV'S TRIP AND OTHER MATTERS RELATED TO MIDDLE EAST

REF: MOSCOW 18386

1. SUMMARY: AMBASSADOR WAS NOT PRESENT WHEN EGYPTIAN MINISTERS
CALLED ON BREZHNEV AND HE HAD NO FURTHER INFORMATION TO OFFER
REGARDING BREZHNEV'S HEALTH OTHER THAN MATERIAL WHICH HAS ALREADY
APPEARED IN CAIRO PRESS. AMBASSADOR THOUGHT, IF MAIN REASON FOR
POSTPONEMENT OF VISIT WAS NOT REPEAT NOT HEALTH, IT COULD HAVE
BEEN DUE TO SOVIET DESIRE TO PERMIT U.S. TO FOLLOW THROUGH ON
STEP-BY-STEP DIPLOMACY. AMBASSADOR CONFIRMED NO DATE HAS BEEN
FIXED FOR RESCHEDULING OF BREZHNEV VISIT ALTHOUGH HE IS CONFIDENT
IT WILL TAKE PLACE. HE ANTICIPATES FURTHER EGYPTIAN-SOVIET
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DISCUSSIONS IN COMING MONTHS REGARDING ECONOMIC, FINANCIAL AND

CULTURAL MATTERS WHICH MAY RESULT IN AGREEMENTS BEING SIGNED. AMBASSADOR SAID MATTER OF SOVIET MILITARY SUPPLIES TO EGYPT IS "VERY TICKLISH" BUT EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE SOVIETS "WOULD FULFILL OBLIGATIONS IN ALL SPHERES". AMBASSADOR WAS CONCERNED ABOUT REPORTS OF DIFFICULTIES IN U.S.-SOVIET RELATIONSHIP, NOTING IMPORTANCE OF DETENTE BETWEEN SUPERPOWERS IF PEACE IN MIDDLE EAST IS TO BE ACHIEVED. END SUMMARY.

2. I CALLED ON EGYPTIAN AMBASSADOR TO USSR HAFEZ ISMAIL JANUARY 6. IN DISCUSSING POSTPONEMENT OF BREZHNEV'S TRIP TO MIDDLE EAST, AMBASSADOR WAS EVASIVE ON QUESTION OF BREZHNEV'S HEALTH. HE SAID HE HAD NOT BEEN PRESENT WHEN FAHMY AND GAMASY HAD CALLED ON BREZHNEV AND, MOREOVER, HE WAS SURE THAT WE HAD RECEIVED IN CAIRO FULL INFORMATION ABOUT THIS AND OTHER MATTERS CONNECTED WITH VISIT OF EGYPTIAN MINISTERS TO MOSCOW. THE AMBASSADOR WENT ON TO RECITE IN DETAIL ACCOUNTS HE HAD READ IN CAIRO PRESS CONCERNING VISIT TO BREZHNEV IN SANATORIUM OUTSIDE OF MOSCOW BUT HE EMPHASIZED HE HAD NO PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE TO CONFIRM THESE ACCOUNTS.

3. AMBASSADOR OBVIOUSLY WISHED TO PLAY DOWN SPECULATION CONCERNING POLITICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN EGYPT AND SOVIET UNION AS REAL REASON FOR POSTPONEMENT OF BREZHNEV TRIP. HE THOUGHT THAT, IF (AND HE STRESSED "IF") HEALTH HAD NOT BEEN PRIME MOTIVATION FOR POSTPONEMENT, IT COULD HAVE BEEN DUE TO DESIRE BY SOVIETS TO "REMOVE OBSTACLE" IN WAY OF FURTHER PROGRESS IN ACCOMPLISHING U.S-SPONSORED STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH IN THIS CONNECTION, HE MENTIONED PRESS REPORTS FROM WEST TO EFFECT THAT A BREZHNEV VISIT TO CAIRO IN MID-JANUARY COULD BE REASON FOR HOLDING UP SECOND PHASE DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT. (COMMENT: AMBASSADOR'S REASONING SEEMS TORTUOUS, TO SAY THE LEAST, AND IS NOT SUPPORTED BY SOVIET OFFICIAL AND PRESS COMMENTARY. END COMMENT).

4. IN FURTHER REMARKS, AMBASSADOR SAID NO DATE HAD BEEN FIXED FOR RESCHEDULING OF BREZHNEV VISIT, ALTHOUGH HE WAS SURE IT WOULD TAKE PLACE AT SOME POINT. HE STRESSED THAT RANGE OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN EGYPT AND USSR WAS SO IMPORTANT THAT SUMMIT-LEVEL MEETING IN CAIRO WAS NOT ONLY APPROPRIATE BUT ESSENTIAL.

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5. AMBASSADOR NOTED THAT SOVIET PRESS COMMENTARY ABOUT VISIT OF FAHMY AND GAMASY HAS BEEN VERY POSITIVE AND THAT SOVIETS CLEARLY ARE MAKING EVERY EFFORT TO PICK UP FAVORABLE COMMENTS FROM EGYPTIAN OFFICIALS AND PRESS. HE ASSERTED THAT, IN FACT, TALKS FAHMY AND GAMASY HAD WITH SOVIET AUTHORITIES IN MOSCOW WERE VERY USEFUL AND HELPFUL IN LAYING GROUND FOR FURTHER EGYPTIAN-SOVIET COOPERATION. AMBASSADOR SAID THAT NO SPECIFIC AGREEMENTS HAD BEEN REACHED IN MOSCOW AND HE ANTICIPATED THAT FURTHER DISCUSSIONS

WOULD BE HELD IN NEXT FEW MONTHS CONCERNING ECONOMIC, FINANCIAL AND CULTURAL MATTERS. IT WAS POSSIBLE THAT THESE DISCUSSIONS WOULD RESULT IN SIGNATURE OF AGREEMENTS ALTHOUGH HE COULD NOT PREDICT EXACTLY THE FORM THEY WOULD TAKE.

6. WHEN I MENTIONED QUESTION OF POSSIBLE RESCHEDULING OF EGYPTIAN DEBT TO USSR, AMBASSADOR SAID THIS ALSO WAS SOMETHING WHICH WOULD BE DISCUSSED.

7. WHEN I MENTIONED PRESS SPECULATION CONCERNING SOVIET MILITARY SUPPLIES TO EGYPT, AMBASSADOR SAID, "THAT IS A VERY TICKLISH QUESTION." HE WENT ON TO COMMENT, IN OBVIOUS RELATIONSHIP TO THIS AREA, THAT HE WAS CONFIDENT SOVIETS WOULD FULFILL THEIR OBLIGATIONS IN ALL SPHERES.

8. ON GENEVA MEPC, TIMING AND PARTICIPATION, AMBASSADOR WAS RATHER VAGUE AND HAD NOTHING NEW TO OFFER BEYOND TERMS OF SOVIET-EGYPTIAN COMMUNIQUE. HE THOUGHT IT WAS OBVIOUSLY IMPORTANT THAT MEPC SHOULD BE RECONVENED WITHOUT UNDUE DELAY, ALTHOUGH HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT PROBLEMS STILL PERSISTED ON ARAB SIDE WITH REGARD TO PARTICIPATION. REFERRING TO CAIRO MEETING JANUARY 4 OF CONFRONTATION STATES AND PLO, HE SAID HE AS YET HAD NO DETAILED INFORMATION ALTHOUGH IT APPEARED TO HIM THAT NOTHING FIRM HAD BEEN DECIDED; IT SEEMED THAT THERE HAD BEEN AN AGREEMENT TO DISAGREE AND THAT FURTHER MEETINGS WOULD BE REQUIRED TO SORT MATTERS OUT REGARDING THE PLO-JORDANIAN RELATIONSHIP.

9. ON RECENT RIOTS IN EGYPT, AMBASSADOR COMMENTED ONLY THAT HE WAS CONVINCED DISTURBANCES WERE CAUSED BY GENUINE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AND THAT NO ONE SHOULD BE MISLED BY POLITICAL LABELS GIVEN TO ALLEGED LEADERS OF RIOTS.

10. AMBASSADOR EXPRESSED CONSIDERABLE CONCERN ABOUT WHAT HE
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UNDERSTOOD TO BE NEW STRAINS IN U.S.-SOVIET RELATIONS CAUSED BY PROVISIONS OF TRADE BILL AND EXIM BANK LEGISLATION. HE REFERRED IN PARTICULAR TO CRITICAL ARTICLE BY ZAMYATIN IN THIS REGARD. IN GENERAL, HE HOPED THAT DIFFICULTIES WOULD NOT PROVE TO BE TOO SERIOUS SINCE GOOD, COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOVIET UNION AND U.S. WAS ESSENTIAL IF PEACE IS TO BE ACHIEVED IN MIDDLE EAST.
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